



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA Proposes Federal Regulations to Protect Black Abalone *Scientific Review Panel Cites Disease as Major Cause in Population Decline*

NOAA Fisheries Service filed with the Federal Register today a proposed rule to list black abalone, a marine mollusk coveted by fishermen and gourmets alike, as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The proposal comes after NOAA Fisheries Service considered the report of a scientific review team concluding that the species is at risk of extinction.

"The scientific review team reported major declines in the population of black abalone, especially in the areas around the Channel Islands off Southern California," said Rod McInnis, Southwest Regional Administrator for NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. "These proposed regulations seek federal protection for black abalone and requests input from the public in determining what areas might be included as critical habitat for the species."

Black abalone were once plentiful in the intertidal waters from Northern Baja California, Mexico, to Monterey, Calif., although there is some scientific debate about how far north the population once extended. The species was utilized by early California natives and peaked as a commercial fishery in the state in 1973 with almost two million pounds harvested.

Since the 1980s, black abalone abundance has plummeted primarily from a bacterial disease known as withering syndrome. Other causes of the rapid population decline are likely due to historical overfishing, poaching and natural predation. NMFS has considered recent preliminary evidence which suggests a small disease resistant population may exist at San Nicolas Island. Even with this possibility, the likelihood that black abalone populations will continue to decline towards extinction (within the next 30 years) is very high.

The proposed rule may be found at: <http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/petition.htm>

Comments on the proposed rule must be received within 90 days after date of publication in the Federal Register. Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

- Electronic Public Comments via Federal eRulemaking Portal:
<http://www.regulations.gov>
- Facsimile (fax): 562-980-4027, Attn: Melissa Neuman
- Mail: Submit written comments to Chief, Protected Resources Division,
Southwest Region, National Marine Fisheries Service, 501 West Ocean
Blvd., Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA, 90802-4213

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the

nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.